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TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AS A MODALITY IN THE FORMULATION, PREPARATION, EXECUTION AND EVALUATION OF THE PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED BY THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND RELATED FIELDS

Report of the Secretary-General

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present report responds to Economic and Social Council decision 1992/205. It presents an overview of various resolutions and decisions on technical cooperation among developing countries and describes efforts to use technical cooperation among developing countries as a modality in the implementation of programmes and projects undertaken by the organizations of the United Nations system. It concludes with recommendations for making technical cooperation among developing countries a more viable option.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The relevance of technical cooperation among developing countries as a modality in the strengthening of national capabilities and building of collective self-reliance was given special impetus in 1978, when the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries was adopted. 1/ Since then, the continued validity of the Plan has been repeatedly reaffirmed in various forms, most recently at the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly (resolution 44/223 of 22 December 1989) and in the South Commission report entitled The Challenge to the South. 2/ The Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlighted the issue when it designated technical cooperation among developing countries as a priority area for capacity-building in the Fifth Programming Cycle (decision 90/34 of 23 June 1990). All this has advanced the need for accelerated and expanded use of technical cooperation among developing countries as a modality in the implementation of programmes and projects.

2. Activities in technical cooperation among developing countries undertaken by the agencies of the United Nations system are generally of two types: promotional or operational. 3/ To facilitate a clear understanding of what constitutes such activities, four main features have been identified:

(a) Technical cooperation between two or more developing countries on an institution-to-institution basis in the public or private sectors;

(b) Sharing of expertise, experience, know-how and facilities;

(c) Activities managed and implemented by Governments and/or institutions of developing countries;

(d) Arranging the finance of cooperation by participating developing countries.

I. BACKGROUND

3. In resolutions since 1974 the General Assembly has maintained that the ultimate goal of technical cooperation among developing countries is national and collective self-reliance by developing countries. The Buenos Aires Plan of Action points out that technical cooperation among developing countries is a multidimensional process, neither an end in itself nor a substitute for technical cooperation with developed countries. It specifically states that "the entire United Nations development system must be permeated by the spirit of technical cooperation among developing countries and all its organizations should play a prominent role as promoters and catalysts". 4/ Thus, all actions at the global level within the United Nations development system were to give priority to the use of such technical cooperation and to strengthen and expand efforts to apply it widely at the national, subregional, regional and interregional levels.

4. In 1978, when the General Assembly urged subregional, regional and interregional organizations to implement the recommendations of the Plan of Action, a high-level meeting of representatives of all countries participating in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was formed. The high-level meeting was subsequently renamed the High-level Committee on the Review of Technical Cooperation Among Developing Countries, and it was entrusted with the overall intergovernmental review of technical cooperation among developing countries. 5/ Since then, at almost every session, the General Assembly has endorsed the validity and relevance of the recommendations and has underscored the importance of implementing the decisions of the High-level Committee. Technical cooperation among developing countries activities are to be fully integrated into the operational activities of the United Nations development system 6/ and should be a key element in the strategy of collective self-reliance and an essential instrument to promote changes contributing to a balanced and equitable process of global economic development.

5. Developing countries have primary responsibility for technical cooperation among themselves, with the developed countries and the United Nations development system assisting and supporting such activities. Financial assistance from other sources is to be regarded as complementary and not as a substitute for the countries' own resources. This would make external funding a catalyst rather than a source of direct support. The United Nations development system, as stressed in the Plan of Action, is to play a prominent role both as promoter and catalyst of technical cooperation among developing countries. This position has also been supported by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) (A/40/656). Developing countries are to strengthen their technical cooperation among developing countries focal points and promote activities by focusing on priority sectors, such as food and agriculture; in concurrence, organizations of the United Nations development system, in accordance with the provision in General Assembly resolution 42/180, are to use the equipment, services, experts and consultants available in developing countries more vigorously and operationally and to continue to review their procurement practices and policies. Further, participating and executing agencies are to intensify efforts to achieve the full utilization of national institutions and build new capacities in those countries.

6. In summary, the General Assembly has contributed to a more structured institutionalization of technical cooperation among developing countries within the United Nations development system, has increasingly viewed technical cooperation among developing countries as an integral part of overall cooperation for development, and has recognized it as one of the most effective means of facilitating collective self-reliance.

II. APPLICATION OF THE MODALITY

7. Since the establishment of the High-level Committee, which meets biennially, seven progress reports have been prepared by it. They profile the advances made in implementing the tasks entrusted to the United Nations development system in promoting and implementing technical cooperation among

developing countries. Information for the reports was compiled through data collected, broadly, in four main areas:

(a) Support to promotional and operational technical cooperation among developing countries activities;

(b) Innovative approaches to technical cooperation among developing countries;

(c) Measures taken or planned by organizations to strengthen their supporting role in promoting technical cooperation among developing countries;

(d) Use of the capabilities of developing countries.

A brief analysis of the progress made in activities reported since 1980 by the United Nations development system is presented below.

8. The review of the progress reports highlights both how technical cooperation among developing countries is perceived by agencies within the United Nations development system and the types of exercises to which the technical cooperation among developing countries modality has been applied. In all the reports of the United Nations system, the need to intensify and expand technical cooperation among developing countries, as mandated by the Buenos Aires Plan of Action, was recognized by the agencies and the Governments. They acknowledged the need to establish focal points, supported by the necessary resources, where they do not exist. They may see technical cooperation among developing countries not as a separate phenomenon but as a key instrument in the whole development process. However, despite such comprehension and insight, progress in the application of the technical cooperation among developing countries modality, on the whole, has been rather slow and lingering.

9. In general, the modality has been promoted through exercises such as networking, meetings, seminars, study tours, symposia, workshops, institutional strengthening, training, information systems, feasibility studies, programming exercises, briefings for agency staff and coordination meetings. The modality has been more frequently applied in activities such as fellowship placements than in purchasing equipment or placing contracts in developing countries. In addition, agencies report that publications dealing with technical cooperation among developing countries, such as periodic bulletins, newsletters, handbooks, manuals and directories have adopted the modality.

A. Constraints

10. In 1989-1990 80 per cent of the agencies queried reported progress in technical cooperation among developing countries. However, various problems were identified in applying the technical cooperation among developing countries modality. In support of promotional and operational activities,

difficulties were encountered in quantifying and comparing the progress achieved in financial terms and in providing statistical and financial data. Since activities were often integral components of other technical assistance projects, difficulties were experienced in identifying and costing components. Problems also occurred in drawing a distinction between technical cooperation among developing countries and some types of regional and interregional projects that aimed at promoting exchanges of skills and experiences (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)) and between promotional and operational technical cooperation among developing countries activities.

11. The effectiveness of national focal points was limited because of lack of resources, functional vagueness and locations (World Health Organization (WHO)). Further, in view of the deficiencies in the institutional structure for technical cooperation among developing countries, a need to strengthen the position of focal points within the government and multilateral development agencies was widely recognized.

12. Problems in the recruitment of experts for technical cooperation among developing countries purposes were experienced owing to difficulties in identifying qualified and experienced personnel; lack of an in-country focal point or personnel database necessary for recruitment, such as a national recruitment service; or limited knowledge of the nature and scope of technical cooperation activities undertaken by the United Nations system (International Labour Organisation (ILO)). In some specialized areas, qualified experts were available only in few countries such as Brazil and India (International Telecommunication Union (ITU)).

13. Constraints to obtaining appropriate equipment from developing countries included the attitudes of government and international project personnel and inability on the part of the developing countries to provide equipment that met international competitive requirements (ILO, ITU). In the field of procurement, with highly specialized agencies, lack of a capacity in manufacturing high technology was a major obstacle to the participation of developing countries (International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), ITU, UNCTAD, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)).

14. Most organizations identified internal procedural constraints that prevented them from substantiating and documenting progress in the application of technical cooperation among developing countries.

15. Constraints in implementation occurred owing to the lack of funds for the promotion of technical cooperation among developing countries activities and the need to rely solely on extrabudgetary funding sources (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Pacific (ECLAC), World Food Council (WFC)).

16. There appears to have existed some confusion among organizations on the distinction between promotional and operational activities and between

economic cooperation among developing countries and technical cooperation among developing countries. This lack of distinction left scope for individual interpretations, resulting in unreliable data.

17. In view of the above experience, agencies within the United Nations development system have taken precise and distinct measures to ensure that specific operational guidelines are developed to facilitate the use of the technical cooperation among developing countries modality in programmes and projects. This calculated and conscious effort was propelled by the High-level Committee's recommendation in 1991 that the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) should review the guidelines on the implementation of the technical cooperation among developing countries modality by the United Nations system and monitor them on a regular basis. 7/

18. As the lead agency in promoting technical cooperation among developing countries, UNDP has defined it as one of the six priority areas in its Fifth Programme Cycle (1992-1996). Special programme resources (SPR) funds have been specially allocated for a wide variety of technical cooperation among developing countries promotional activities. Besides continuing to support the promotional activities covered during the past programming cycle (1987-1991), such as programming exercises on matching the needs and capacities of developing countries, provision of data and information, training seminars, workshops and study tours for national personnel on the technical cooperation among developing countries approach, methodology and opportunities and ad hoc activities of a promotional and operational nature, SPR will be used in the present cycle for heightened attention to activities and projects that promote networking and twinning arrangements; joint efforts that address common problems; direct focus on the transfer of specific skills; sustaining opportunities for launching projects through the matching of needs and capacities; and building and improving data and information on capacities in developing countries. Demonstration and pilot projects are to be undertaken to test new approaches and refine novel initiatives. Additionally, technical cooperation among developing countries has received increased attention on the agendas of senior management committees such as the Action Committee and the Policy Team of UNDP.

19. Other agencies in the United Nations development system have focused their activities on institution-building, networking institutions and information systems on a regional basis, the exchange of technical information and directories of national institutions, needs and capacities studies, and seminars, workshops and study tours for strengthening technical cooperation among developing countries. Some organizations have more explicit and lucid policies on using the modality. WHO, for instance, promoted collaboration between various institutions of developing countries for joint activities and sharing of knowledge and technical capacities. It participated in technical meetings of senior experts from developing countries and provided financial support; prepared a technical cooperation among developing countries directory, identified needs and potential support and provided technical support for the formulation of the technical cooperation among developing countries activities in health care.

20. The medium-term plan of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (1992-1997) identifies seven elements of technical cooperation among developing countries strategy, provides essential information on approach and strategy in its handbook on technical cooperation among developing countries (1992) and publishes a periodic newsletter on the subject. UNIDO has a framework for all its programmes system-wide. Recently, its Industrial Development Board adopted a multipoint framework on economic cooperation among developing countries and technical cooperation among developing countries in the 1990s. 8/ To facilitate and encourage further the use of the technical cooperation among developing countries modality, some organizations have decentralized the use of related funds to their field offices (WHO, ILO, FAO) which has contributed to both speed and efficiency in the use of those funds.

21. On the whole, there is a concerted effort to move towards a higher level of management commitment to technical cooperation among developing countries and to articulate more explicitly the policy, strategy, programmes, funding and administrative arrangements for it in individual organizations. Technical cooperation among developing countries has been firmly placed on the agenda of governing bodies of agencies within the United Nations system. In response, some organizations have initiated a procedure of regular and methodical review of their technical cooperation among developing countries activities for institutional memory.

B. Extent of success

22. Agencies in the United Nations development system continue to attach major importance to technical cooperation among developing countries as a means of fostering the individual and collective self-reliance of developing countries. Clearly technical cooperation among developing countries needs to be seen as key to the whole development effort - not as an alternative but as a complement to the more conventional forms of development assistance. There is agreement that technical cooperation among developing countries as a modality has not been fully put to use. Although it has continued to make progress, it has advanced "not to the desired extent". 9/

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

23. A synopsis of the findings and recommendations identified during the course of this review is presented below.

24. All parties involved should:

(a) Inspire a change in attitude whereby technical cooperation among developing countries becomes widely appreciated and applied as an effective, less costly and relevant modality of cooperation;

(b) Simplify the gathering and accessing of data on capacities available in developing countries, while increasing coverage and currency;

(c) Use demonstration and pilot projects to test new approaches and refine novel initiatives;

(d) Strengthen the national technical cooperation among developing countries focal points to play a stronger role as a channel of information.

25. Governments should:

(a) Encourage and facilitate, as a preferred option, the use of technical cooperation among developing countries for programme and project implementation;

(b) Adopt explicitly stated national policies favourable to the use of technical cooperation among developing countries in national development plans;

(c) Strengthen or, where appropriate, establish national focal points for the promotion of technical cooperation among developing countries through sensitization, dissemination of information and promotional efforts;

(d) Identify and facilitate certain sectors where technical cooperation among developing countries could be more widely applied;

(e) Sensitize officials in governmental institutions, the private sectors, non-governmental organizations, etc. on the comparative advantages of using the technical cooperation among developing countries modality for the exchange of technology, expertise and experience - e.g., the relevant technical cooperation, its appropriateness, cost-efficiency etc;

(f) Strengthen and streamline the process of matching technical cooperation needs and capacities.

26. The United Nations development system should:

(a) Use the technical cooperation among developing countries modality in the implementation of the programmes and projects of the system by ensuring that the modality is given first consideration, both during the formulation and implementation process and through the systematic involvement of field offices during the project identification phase;

(b) Ensure more focused effort in using the capacities of developing countries, including appropriate technical and hardware components that pertain to the technical cooperation among developing countries modality, within the priority areas of the system;

(c) Enhance the role of agencies in the system in assisting Governments with the identification of needs and capacities for cooperation among developing countries in their areas of specialization;

(d) Improve and expand the information services provided by the technical cooperation among developing countries/Information Referral System, so that up-to-date information will be readily available on the capacities of institutions of developing countries;

(e) Encourage Governments, public and private institutions, and non-governmental organizations to consider the option of using the technical cooperation among developing countries modality in project implementation and to adopt policies favourable to the wider use of technical cooperation among developing countries;

(f) Assisting Governments in the preparation of projects and programmes for cooperation in applying the technical cooperation among developing countries modality regardless of the source of funds.

Notes

1/ See Report of the United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, Buenos Aires, 30 August-12 September 1978 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.78.II.A.11).

2/ London, Oxford University Press, 1990.

3/ Promotional activities are intended to strengthen the capacity of institutions in developing countries to engage in technical cooperation among developing countries or to prepare the foundation for launching operational activities using the modality. Operational activities involve the application of technical cooperation among developing countries by actual sharing and exchange of technical resources, capabilities and skills between two or more developing countries.

4/ See Report of the United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries, Buenos Aires, 30 August-12 September 1978 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.78.II.A.11), chap. I, para. 45.

5/ See General Assembly resolution 35/202.

6/ See General Assembly resolution 40/196.

7/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 39 (A/46/39) (decision 7/1).

8/ IDB.8, decision 5, of 5 July 1991.

9/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 39 (A/46/39), para. 23.